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THE SOUTH AND MR. TAFT

[The Editor invited a number of Southern men, all Democrats by training and students of varying political tendencies, to express their views on the South in its relation to the Presidential candidates. Owing to stress of work and engagements, most of these regrettably declined. Mr. McBee's contribution, however, is of sufficient interest to present here, even without the other papers, especially as the reasons for the South's support of Mr. Bryan, Mr. Taft's chief opponent, have been naturally fully exploited, and are generally known.—THE EDITOR.]

Will the great body of Southern States, with their matchless record of Southern men who led in establishing freedom on this Continent, allow themselves to be voted *en masse* like a flock of sheep by a political organization that no longer stands for their ideals and that does not represent their history? This is really the issue which the Editor of THE SEWANEE REVIEW has asked me to meet, and it transcends all party or sectional considerations. It touches the very heart of the Nation's life and affects for weal or woe every component part of the Nation itself. The Nation needs the South; the South needs the Nation. Both are warped and maimed by the presence of a solid block of States incapable of assimilating, or being assimilated in, the National life so long as they remain solid. The necessity for removing this bar to national unity is incalculably greater now that America is accepting its world relationships. These newer responsibilities from without but intensify and magnify responsibilities at home. To no part of the Nation is it of more vital concern that home problems should be settled and settled right than to the South. No part of the Nation more truly needs the commercial, industrial and trade relations that are developing in all parts of the world than does the South. No part offers finer natural resources, more congenial climate and a more hospitable people than the South. But if the South remains isolated politically, immigrant and enterprise, capital and labor, will pass it by for less favored fields. Isolation will have its blighting effect upon industrial, political, intellectual and religious freedom, without which no people can be great.

The issue is real for the Nation. It is vital for the South. It must be settled and settled right some time. Why not now? It is not merely, "Give me liberty or give me death!" but it is the concrete application of this principle which found expression in that other and nobler utterance of our own Patrick Henry: "British oppression has effaced the boundaries of the Colonies. I am no longer a Virginian but an American." Under the partisan oppression of the Republican party the boundaries of the "Solid South" were established. The Southern man, true to his noblest traditions, may justly claim that the partisan oppression of the Democratic party has effaced those boundaries. He may assert now with Patrick Henry: "I am no longer a sectionalist but an American." The time is ripe for the South to identify itself absolutely with the Nation by recovering its political liberty. This is the only course worthy of its high traditions, and it is absolutely necessary to a future of promise and true heroism.

These are not the only reasons, powerful as they are, for breaking up the old tradition of a "Solid South." The boundaries which have kept in isolation the solid block of Southern States are being indirectly effaced by the Democratic organization. But positively the same result has been secured by President Roosevelt's policy in making himself the President of the whole Nation; by his refusal to be controlled either by sectional prejudice or by the traditional attitude of the Republican party towards the South. In his Federal appointments in the South he has gone entirely outside party lines. It is widely and generously recognized in the South that these appointments average higher than any made by the Federal Government since the War. All party records have been broken by President Roosevelt's policy of appointing eminent Southern Democrats to office. The most significant example of this high and inspiring type of Nationalism was the appointment of Luke E. Wright of Tennessee, an ex-Confederate, a Southern Democrat in good standing as a Southern Democrat, into his Cabinet as Secretary of War. The appointment of Mr. Wright was no mere accident. He had been associated with Mr. Taft in the Philippines. He had been Governor of the Philippines as Mr.

Taft's successor, and later was Ambassador to Japan. In all of these capacities he had demonstrated that a Southern Democrat, without the sacrifice of his convictions or his self-respect, could coöperate heart and soul with President Roosevelt in the service of his country. But Secretary Wright has shown more than this. Since most of his service in the National Administration was with Mr. Taft, he has proved that in Mr. Taft's Administration the whole South would find it possible, if it chose, to serve the Nation as he has done and is doing in the Administration of President Roosevelt.

The time is ripe because Mr. Bryan does not represent the principles which the South solidified itself to defend, and Mr. Taft does not represent the vicious principles it solidified itself to fight. But Mr. Taft does represent the ideals of the historic South entrusted to posterity by those great Southern heroes who contributed them to the National life. I have yet to meet one of my fellow countrymen in the South who is prepared to vote for Mr. Bryan on his positive merits as a statesman and his worthiness as such to take a place with the South's great heroes — and my acquaintance is not a limited one. I can with equal emphasis state that there are hosts of Southern men who recognize in Mr. Taft a true statesman and tried administrator. Their desire and hope is that Mr. Taft will be made President even in spite of their own votes; but who yet feel constrained by the bondage of the "Solid South" to vote against their convictions and for Mr. Bryan. The first and only time I ever met General John B. Gordon, he said to me with regard to Mr. Bryan's second campaign for the Presidency: "I have never seen our people voting the Democratic ticket more reluctantly than with Mr. Bryan now at its head." What was true then, is, I believe, a hundredfold more true to-day. How can a good citizen of the Republic, with such convictions, withhold his best service from his own people in the South and from the Nation of which it is a component part?

The time is ripe because that period has arrived when the Civil War, with its causes and its results good and bad, should be reverently handed over to the historian and to the political philosopher. Our faces should be turned to the future for action

based upon the foundation principles of the Republic. It is time for free men to exercise their freedom in great enterprise, ready to suffer and to sacrifice for the righteousness that can alone establish peace and insure a prosperity that will endure as a blessing and an inspiration to the people.

The time is ripe because the "dark cloud" that threatened from North and East and West for many painful and disastrous years menaces no longer. There is no purpose, there seems to exist no desire, ever again to attempt a "force bill" involving social equality. It is recognized everywhere that society is a law unto itself; that it establishes its own standards uncontrolled and uncontrollable by legislation or political domination. The desire to give ignorance domination over intelligence, politically or legislatively; or to use the negro as a political club to defeat reforms in the Nation; or to oppress the people of the South, seems to have departed from the American people as a people. There is a profound desire to do justice to the negro, to enlighten and to civilize him. The people of all sections — and none more earnestly or more nobly than representative men in the South — seem increasingly determined to remove the negro from partisan politics in order to deal intelligently, patiently, wisely and honestly with the problem involved in his presence among us.

No more perfect illustration of what I have said could be imagined than the Brownsville incident. In the interest of Army discipline, in defence of life and order, and, above all, in the highest interest of the negro race itself, President Roosevelt, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, administered drastic punishment to negro soldiers. The punishment for the offence was normal to the man of war, but to a peace-loving and a peace-loving people it was easy to misinterpret and misrepresent it, and easier still to distort it utterly in the eyes of those steeped in prejudice and desiring for economic and selfish reasons to hamper the great reforms advocated by the President in the Nation. If ever in our history an incident lent itself to a revival of the worst prejudices and the worst passions of section and race and selfish greed, this furnished the occasion. The attack in the Senate was led by one of the most brilliant politicians of

the day. He had the sympathy in and out of the Senate of that element known as "stand-patters" opposed to reform or development and looking primarily to the limitation of privilege in the interests of the whole people. Papers of intellectual force, like *The Springfield Republican* and *The Evening Post*, together with fanatics here and there who were ready to employ and did employ able legal talent to discredit the Administration, all combined to awaken and to excite racial, sectional and moneyed prejudice and passion. The result is known to every one. The attack failed ignominiously alike in the Senate and in the country. The fight was then carried into Ohio by the same forces, represented by the two Senators from Ohio and backed by the Republican organization there. Let it be noted that the fight was concentrated upon Secretary Taft as standing on all fours with the President in all the issues that were raised. A blow at Mr. Taft was to be a blow at the President. The triumphant nomination of Mr. Taft in a State like Ohio under such conditions is simply phenomenal in view of the record of the Republican party since the War. I can see no meaning in this entire transaction except that the race problem, the political use of the negro as a "dark cloud" with which to threaten the South, has really been taken out of politics by the American people, and has passed into that domain of serious study, self-sacrificing labor and sympathetic coöperation in uplifting a helpless race where alone it belongs and where alone it can be solved.

The time is ripe because President Roosevelt and Mr. Taft, working together in absolute harmony, have contributed enormously to the removal of this obstacle and all other obstacles that stood or stand in the way of the complete unity of the Nation. And yet Mr. Bryan and his political managers are silent on these issues. They have contributed nothing at any time to their right solution. They are to-day reported to be manipulating the Brownsville incident in order to secure a condemnation of the Government's action at the polls by the negroes in the doubtful States in the North. Even if it is only an acquiescent attitude on the part of Mr. Bryan, it indicates a willingness to continue the political manipulation of the racial issue. But it

means much more than that. It indicates that Mr. Bryan is neither the friend of the negro in the South nor of the white man; that he would neither discipline the negro for his crimes nor protect him in his rights. Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft stand in their record and will stand in the future square and flat-footed as the punishers of criminals and the defenders of the rights of men of all races and all colors and all sections of the Nation.

The time is ripe for Southern men to take their part in their Nation and with all Nations that are moving steadily and surely along democratic lines toward the democratic ideal, beside Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft; men recognized in America and in the Nations beyond the sea as the foremost leaders in this onward march. I am not speaking merely my own convictions. I am not questioning the rights of those who feel differently. I am stating a fact borne witness to by students of political and social economy in practically all the great universities of the world. I honor every man of conviction who has the courage to stand for his convictions and to vote for them. I desire that all who find in Mr. Bryan their ideal should vote for him as truly as that those who find in Mr. Taft a nearer approach to their ideal than in Mr. Bryan should vote for him. But it is painful to see the efforts that high-minded men are making to justify themselves in voting for Mr. Bryan. The Hon. E. M. Shepard's efforts to justify himself and his fellow citizens of New York and the Nation in voting for Mr. Bryan are typical. His fine-toothed search for a little spot upon which to stand in his support of Mr. Bryan would furnish a psychological laboratory with study for months to come!

Mr. Bryan gives no promise of hope for the laboring people of this country. He has his place in the covenant that his managers have entered into with Mr. Gompers, a political manipulator of labor, but not a patient student of social and economic problems. There is no nobler, no more loyal body of citizens than those represented by the great and conservative labor unions. Mr. Bryan's superficial studies of the kaleidoscopic changes on social and economic questions would not commend him to membership in these unions. They rely on the scientific

study and the steady evolution of the rights and privileges of laboring men in the democracy such as ours. To turn from some of Mr. Bryan's writings to John Mitchell's book is to turn from guesswork to a student's solid contribution to the protection and development of the just rights not only of labor but of capital. John Mitchell records no desire for a tragic or clap-trap political advantage over those with whom he is contending. He fully understands that unrest and the constant change of the standard of values would be as damaging to labor as it would be to capital, and more damaging to the country than to either or both. Mr. Bryan has nothing to contribute to the laborer of any race except agitation and change. And when we have said this with regard to this great and honored body of American citizens, we have really spoken for all. Their true interests are the just and common interests of all Americans.

The duplicity of a double standard for money is as damaging in its immoral effects, so far as the people are concerned, as the duplicity of a double standard in character would be. This heresy or defect in Mr. Bryan's mental makeup seems to be a defect that increases with his years. I do not speak of his sincerity or of his intentional integrity. I am not a judge of these and I am not primarily concerned with these. It is not his conscience, but his folly, that is open to the judgment of his fellow citizens. His principle of a double standard seems to have developed, until he has a whole company of standards, upon or from any or all of which he seems to feel at liberty to speak and act. Surely no man in recent public life has presented himself to the American people more often and in more varied ways in opposition to President Roosevelt and to those principles of reform and patriotism that found expression in his "Winning of the West" and in his earlier writings before he had entered public life. Now that Mr. Roosevelt, whether some people like it or not, stands as the great living American, holding in his hand and yet cheerfully laying aside the nomination for the presidency — and if reports from all sections, including Southern States, can be trusted, holding in his hand and voluntarily laying aside a majority of the suffrages of his people greater even than at his last election — Mr. Bryan comes

forward, unconscious even of the humor of the situation, and attempts to balance himself on the single standard of Theodore Roosevelt in order to secure votes under the shadow of his great name! I have opposed Mr. Bryan in every election since he first used the symbol of Supreme Sacrifice in behalf of labor, though he has never sacrificed himself or his personal interests either for labor or the party that honored him with its nomination. I have found nothing in all these years sufficiently constructive, positive or permanent in his ever-changing policy to justify my voting as a Democrat for him; but I must confess that I have never conceived it possible that he would put himself before the American people as professedly unable to secure the presidency unless he could do so as at once the father and the son of Theodore Roosevelt's policies.

I am a lifelong Democrat. I have never joined a Republican organization of any kind whatsoever. Political freedom I regard as I do religious freedom, as lying at the very foundation of citizenship. Theodore Roosevelt is the only Republican president whom I have ever voted for, but I shall vote for William H. Taft for the same reason that I voted for President Roosevelt. They more nearly represent the Democracy I inherited from the South's great forebears and the nation's greatest men, than any living Democrat. It is not given to men to be perfect and to satisfy all ideals. We are creatures of moral evidence, of moral certainty and moral responsibility. But it is given to some men to occupy a moral supremacy that commands confidence, affection and absolute loyalty. William H. Taft's public career and private life justify all these. He is greater than any party; too great for any section and too noble to limit to any section, party or school, his sympathy, his interest and his life, which by public acts and the sacrifice of his own personal ambitions in the line of his profession as a lawyer, he has consecrated to the service of his country. He is too large-minded and too great-hearted to limit his conception of his Nation's service to anything short of its full part in the family of nations. He has justified this character in every office at home in which he has served the people of the United States—as Governor of the Philippines he has outlined a policy so disin-

terested, so altruistic, so full of honor to the American nation and promise to the Philippine people, that I fail to find, even in the colonial history of England, that great colonizing country, anything worthy to stand beside it. I heard Lord Cromer, who is regarded as England's greatest living colonial administrator, a few weeks ago in the House of Lords set forth in his famous speech on old age pensions some of his ideals. In that debate Lord Rosebery, Lord Lansdowne and the greater leaders in the House of Lords took part, but not a single great, constructive principle of unselfish patriotism fell from any of the debaters, not even from Lord Cromer. I came home grateful and conscious that the people of the United States were singularly blessed in having so great a man as Mr. Taft to succeed President Roosevelt and to continue the administration of this government in the interest of all the people of the United States, with a single eye to the establishment of righteousness at home and the fulfillment of our right relations with all nations. For the South to free itself and vote its convictions in November would do something more than break up the "Solid South." It would inaugurate a new era in statesmanship and create new demands upon patriotism. It would weld into indestructible fellowship all parts of the nation, and make it possible to combine the best elements in all for the common defense and the common good.

SILAS MCBEE.